

Over the Threshold

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Summary: Regulus Black has been waiting for a very long time to see his brother again. He's had a lot of time to think, and a lot on his mind.

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"You're dead."

The words were simple. A three year old could have understood what they meant, and yet here he was, staring at the boy across the table from him as though he had three heads. He'd just been duelling a few moments ago, and yet here he was, sat in what looked to be The Leaky Cauldron, a pint on the table in front of him, and his brother seated across, a glass in his own hand though he was surely not drinking the same ale that was in his own glass.

"Are you going to respond or are you just going to stare at me? You're dead, Sirius. Why else would you be having a pint with me of all people?"

Her picked up the glass and drank it greedily, trying to wrap his mind around the situation he'd suddenly found himself in. He held the now empty pint glass for a moment, a finger tracing the rim of it before he set it back down on the table. No sooner did glass meet wood and it had filled itself again. The boy sitting across from him merely took a sip from his own glass before putting it down and folding his arms across his chest.

"I've waited here for years for you. The least you could do is answer me."

He looked just like him. The last time he'd seen him had been months before he had been assumed dead, but whatever this was could definitely have been what his brother would have looked like by the time he'd been declared legally dead. His hair was longer. That wouldn't have meant much to most, but his brother had always kept his hair neat, and here he was, his hair too long to have any sort of style to it, and yet too short to be tied back away from his face. He supposed that was what threw him off, though there were other differences that were worth noting. He was pale, paler than he'd ever been in life, but if he were right, and he were dead, he supposed that made sense.

Only it really didn't. He was really unnaturally pale. If he'd been locked in the basement for his entire life he mused that he might be a shade or two darker than he was now. It was almost as if he was blue rather than any natural skin tone. He was a lot thinner than he'd been the last time he'd seen him as well, and that was saying something. His brother had always been very slight, and now it seemed as if he were skin and bones " literally. The bags under his eyes were made only more obvious by the fact that his skin was so unnaturally pale, and yet there he sat with a smirk while he watched him across the table.

What was more alarming than anything was the fact that his brother still appeared to be eighteen years old, despite the fact that he should have been nearer to his mid thirties, were he alive today.

"_Seriously_? You're just going to sit there and stare at me?"

He couldn't help but laugh, "No, not Sirius _Lee_, Sirius _Black_."

"Fuck you. All these years and the first thing you have to say is your _name_? In case you haven't noticed, or in case however you died caused you to become deafened momentarily, _you're dead_." Regulus had spat back at him venomously, picking up his glass " some kind of red wine, Sirius could now identify " and draining it. "Fuck you."

He leaned back in his chair, dragging his fingers through his hair. He'd been duelling with Bellatrix, and she'd hit him with " he didn't know. Had it been the killing curse? No. He remembered falling. "I fell. We're dead." It seemed ridiculous. He'd fallen, and it had killed him. Of all of the idiotic, reckless and dangerous things he'd done in his entire life, his cousin had managed to kill him, and without even using the killing curse.

"We are." Regulus had said quietly. He seemed to be thinking, staring at the glass in his hand for a moment before putting it back down and allowing it to refill. "You'll get used to it. Plenty to drink. Judging from your appearance I'd guess that was _important_ to you later in life."

Sirius had laughed. Trust his proper, prejudiced, pureblooded brother to be passing judgement at a time like this. He'd just died. Weren't you able to watch your loved ones from Heaven though? If this was what this was, and it was anything like what Lily had once described to him, Regulus would have known the answer to that question. "They don't exactly carry imported ale in Azkaban," the comment was off

handed more than direct, but it hit Regulus stronger than any stunner could have.

The younger brother stood up from his chair, letting it fall to the ground behind him. "Azkaban?" You could practically see the wheels turning, his mind was racing, "Tell me you didn't kill Mother. I know you wanted to, you threatened it so many times. Just tell me it was some one you thought was a Death Eater."

Sirius couldn't laugh now, picking up his pint and taking a long drink. "I would have if I could have, believe me. I would have loved to kill that rat bastard. Blew the street up and ran off before I had the chance." He could see that his brother was confused, and continued, "I was sent to Azkaban without trial for the murder of Peter Pettigrew and twelve muggles."

"Your friend?"

Sirius slammed his glass back down, feeling it both shatter and repair itself in his hand, before any ale could even be spilt. "Don't you dare call him that. He was no friend of mine. He may as well have killed James and Lily himself."

"Potter and Evans didn't survive the war?"

"No, Regulus, the Potters didn't survive the first war, and if I don't get back to the second one, their son might not survive it either." But he couldn't go back could he?

Regulus picked his chair up and sat back down, allowing this new information to sink in while he had another mouthful of wine, "You can't get back. Believe me, I've tried. I can't find a door. If I break a window to try and leave it just repairs itself. This is it. We're dead."

"I know. You can stop saying that."

"But you don't know, Sirius. You just said you had to get back. You can't because you are dead. You are dead and I am dead and there is nothing for the rest of eternity that we have to do because we are-"

"Dead." Sirius had cut him off, knowing what he was going to say. What he wasn't expecting was for his brother to follow up with what he did.

"Did you get the rest of the horcruxes? Tell me you got them. I've been waiting to find out about them for so long." His brother practically looked excited, leaning across the table towards him, his hands clasped together.

"What the hell is a horcrux?"

His answer clearly wasn't what Regulus had wanted to hear as again he stood, his chair flying away from him this time as he picked up his glass and threw it at the wall, letting out a colourful string of curses as he did. Sirius stood back, when Regulus had grabbed his pint glass and thrown it before muttering a blasting charm at the table itself and watching as it exploded between them. "Tell me you're not serious. Tell me you're joking, and I- I swear to god if

you joke about your name I'll make you wish you were-

"_Dead_? Little late for that." Sirius hadn't meant for it to be a joke, but there was his usually calm and composed little brother throwing a temper tantrum, because of what exactly? A horcrux?

"You have no idea â€" I swear he was right all along, The Order of the Phoenix truly is full of imbeciles and idiots. Horcruxes, Sirius. As in Voldemort's horcruxes. The things that he's locked pieces of his soul in. Six of them as far as I can tell. I died getting _one_ of them." He was short of breath, eyes wild as he stared at his brother, "Please tell me that you know what I'm talking about."

Sirius bit his lip, and shook his head.

Regulus resumed his cursing, though now that there was nothing left nearby for him to destroy, it only served to entertain Sirius. "The locket. Did Kreacher ever manage to destroy the locket?"

"Kreacher never spoke of a locket. You died for a _locket_?"

"I died for a _horcrux_ so that when he finally met his match he could actually be killed. As long as the horcruxes exist Voldemort is immortal, as well as anyone can be. He's put a piece of his soul into them, and as such, if he is killed, his soul is still able to live on, and he'll come back."

"_They_ killed you for it?"

"I _drowned_ â€" that's hardly important right now."

The brothers stood, staring at each other over the wreckage of the table in silence for a few seconds. The table fixed itself, their chairs righted themselves and came back to rest behind them, and even the broken glass was repaired before their eyes, another pint and another glass of wine sitting on the table. As though it had been a silent invitation, they both sat down to have another drink.

They sat like that for a few minutes, each man going through two or three full glasses of their drink of choice before one spoke

"There's nothing we can do now."

Sirius looked up from his ale at his brother when he spoke, strange though it was. He'd lived the entire rest of his life from the point that Regulus has died onward believing that he'd gotten in over his head and been killed for wanting to leave, and it seemed now that his brother had never been caught in his betrayal, and had died helping to take him down. "Why didn't you come to me? We could have _helped_ you."

Regulus laughed, shaking his head, "I couldn't put it on anyone else. I made my own decisions in life, and enough people were hurt as a result while I was alive by them. If I'd come to you you would have been an even bigger target than you were."

"So? I was already a target. Dumbledore would have helped. We all would have. And then we would have known about the horcruxes."

"And he would have made more." He picked up his glass of wine, and it was at this point that Sirius realized that it didn't seem to matter that he'd had several pints, he still felt completely sober, and he suspected that Regulus was still sober as well. "I couldn't bear the thought of being responsible for one more death, Sirius. I couldn't come to you."

"Did you want to?"

"Of course I wanted to. I'd have given anything to get out of that cave alive. I expect my body is still in the lake, probably one of the masses of inferi that pulled me under by now."

Sirius nodded, though his mind strayed from the answer he'd gotten back to how his brother had died. Drowning had always sounded like one of the worst ways to die to him. Cold, wet, unable to breathe — completely helpless and uncomfortable, and his brother had gone into it willingly, at eighteen years of age. "I wish you'd let me teach you to swim when we were younger," the joke fell flat, and even Sirius himself couldn't smile at it.

"Again, dragged to the bottom of the lake by Inferi. It wouldn't have mattered if I'd known how to swim because I was being restrained."

That only made drowning sound that much worse to Sirius, and then picked up his pint, though he had already concluded that the drink was pointless. His brother had died with everyone believing that he was on the wrong side of the war. He'd died a horrible death, and then to top it off, he'd spent _seventeen years _sitting in this room with a glass of wine, evidently waiting just for him. "I wish things had been different."

"Obviously I do too. The only person who knows about the horcruxes now is Kreacher."

"Kreacher isn't a _person_, Reg."

"And _that _is why he has kept his word to me after all this time instead of telling you what you couldn't figure out for yourself. Would it kill you to have read a book at some point and learned something?"

"Azkaban isn't big on reading material either."

Again they both fell into silence, though neither drank this time. Neither one of them had led the life that they could have had, and definitely neither one had led the life that they would have wanted for themselves or for each other. One had died well before his time, and one had spent years locked up for a crime that he hadn't committed.

"To get the locket I had to drink a potion." Regulus had finally offered, breaking the silence though he didn't look up at Sirius. "The first cup wasn't bad. Nothing happened, but by the end of the second, it felt like my stomach was going to burst. It was worse than the cruciatus."

Sirius was already dreading the rest of the story, but as much as he

didn't want to hear it, it seemed as though Regulus had waited here since he had died with the purpose of telling Sirius whatever it was he wanted to. He didn't see any doors in the room, and clearly if he'd broken any windows in an effort to escape, they would have simply repaired themselves before he could have gotten out. Regulus had told him as much. Had the room done a number on his sanity?

"And then it got worse. It was terrifying. It made me feel completely helpless, made me remember all of the worst memories of my life â€" mainly the day that you left. You yelled at Mother and she yelled back, and neither one of you heard me on the stairs, yelling for you both to stop. You were both so focused on each other and I couldn't do anything. I couldn't help you. She took it out on me after you left but Iâ€|"

"I wanted to go back for you, Reg. I wanted to go back that night and take you with me, but I couldn't. James was right when he said that Mother would have killed me on sight if I'd set foot in the home. Every time I saw you after that at school you were with someone, whether that was on purpose or not â€" I never got the chance to see you alone again, and I wish I had. I _missed_ you."

Regulus' breath caught in his throat and he swallowed, reaching up to wipe at his eyes, looking suddenly much younger and smaller than he actually was, though nothing had actually changed. "I missed you too. I'm sorry for everything I caused." His voice had dropped, both in tone and volume.

"You don't have to apologize to me. I need to apologize to you. I wasn't a very good brother. I should have risked it and gone back. You were so much _braver_ than me." It was strange, sitting here, hashing out something that to him had happened a lifetime ago, and yet Regulus had sat here for years with nothing other than his own thoughts to trouble him, and a glass of wine that would never allow him to get drunk.

"I never wanted to hurt anybody â€" and I never â€" I _never_ actually killed anybody myself. I was more a symbol to him than anything. The heir to the oldest and most pure blood in the Wizarding world. It was all about status."

"And the name has ended now. Reg, it doesn't matter. None of it matters anymore. It's clear you've made up for anything you might have done wrong in life in your death. I only wish I had known so I could have _saved_ you."

Regulus' body heaved with a sob that he couldn't contain anymore, and Sirius stood, rounding the table to pull him into his arms. The two hadn't hugged since Regulus had gotten off of the Hogwarts Express before being sorted in his first year, and it took a few moments for the younger Black's arms to reach up and around his brother. "_I missed you so much_."

"I missed you too, and I'm sorry that I believed you were one of them for this longâ€| Someday someone will discover what you've done, and they'll clear your name."

"I don't care what the rest of the world thinks about me any more. I just â€" I needed _you_ to know Siri. I needed you to know that I wasn't who you thought I was. I wasn't who _I_ thought I was."

Regulus spoke quietly, his breath catching even now as he spoke and he caught himself wiping more of his tears on Sirius' shoulder.

"I know that now, Regulus. I know."

There was a creaking sound, which had the two brothers looking up, and across the room, a door that hadn't been there a moment before had opened, letting more light into the room than they could bear to look at. It was loud, music playing, people laughing, it sounded so full of life, and yet they both knew that they were dead.

"Have you seen that before?" Sirius asked, and Regulus shook his head, rooted in place as he stared at the opening. "Should we go?" Regulus didn't respond, and Sirius could feel him shaking. It only served to further his belief that his brother had waited in this very room for him since his death. Hell, he'd been in here nearly as long as he'd been alive if time had flowed just the same.

A voice came through the door, "_I swear to god Padfoot if you don't stop staring at the light and come through the door I'm going to come in there and get you myself._"

Sirius couldn't contain his excitement at hearing James' voice, and he took a step forward, only to feel Regulus pull away from him. He glanced back, but Regulus had just waved in the direction of the door. "Go on. Your friend is waiting for you." He could only stare at Regulus, who looked away from the door now and down at his feet. He looked like the ten year old kid he'd left on the platform when he'd left for his first year of Hogwarts. He looked like he was ready to be left behind.

"_I swear too â€œ_" The voice that came through now was unfamiliar to Sirius, but it made Regulus look up from his feet and back at the door, "_If you leave me out here with them any longer I'm going to find a way to kill myself. Again._"

"That's _Evan_. Rosier." Regulus had said, and Sirius could see the slight smile that had come across his face, though it didn't quite reach the corners of his lips it was clear in his eyes.

"_Well_? It would be rude to keep them waiting much longer. Together?" Sirius had asked, putting his arm back around Regulus' shoulders.

The younger boy practically beamed now, a smile that Sirius knew he'd never seen on him before as he nodded, "Together," And they took the room at a run, crossing over the threshold side by side.

End
file.